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ABSTRACT

This document presents Alaska State guidelines for including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient in statewide assessments. An overview section explains that Alaska has developed a two-tiered Comprehensive System of Student Assessments comprised of regular assessments (criterion referenced tests at grades 3, 6, 8 and high school completion) and alternate assessments for students with disabilities, who, even with accommodations, are unable to participate in the regular assessments. A section on making decisions about students with disabilities first stresses the importance of including parents, then offers accommodation guidelines for students in special education and students with a 504 accommodation plan, explains test accommodations versus test modifications, and presents guidelines for selecting test accommodations. The following section is on making decisions about students who are limited English proficient. It first identifies characteristics of students who are limited English proficient and then outlines recommended language proficiency assessment procedures for these students. (DB)

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PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

For Alaska Students in State Assessments

2001/2002

Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

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LETTER FROM COMMISSIONER

Dear Alaskans,

In 1997 and 1998, the Alaska State Legislature enacted laws that require the assessment of Alaska students to ensure accountability of Alaska's public schools. To achieve this goal, the Department of Education & Early Development established the Comprehensive System of Student Assessments as the primary tool for assessing the academic achievement of our students. The system consists of Benchmark Examinations at Grades 3, 6, and 8, the TerraNova CAT/6 at Grades 4, 5, 7, and 9, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination.

In the past, some students were excluded from assessment; particularly those not proficient in English or those with severe disabilities. The Federal Government has mandated that all Alaska students participate in the Comprehensive System of Student Assessments. This publication, Participation Guidelines for Alaska Students in State Assessments was prepared to help Alaska fulfill its commitment to include all students in state assessments. This booklet provides guidance for making decisions about the participation, in regular assessments, of students with disabilities and with limited English Proficiency. It also provides guidance for deciding if a student requires a testing accommodation or modification.

This document should be viewed as a work in progress and has been published knowing the difficulty of anticipating each circumstance that may arise when making decisions about assessing students with disabilities and with limited English proficiency.

Last year, the Alaska State Legislature modified the statute regarding the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination and directed the Department of Education & Early Development to develop an alternative assessment program for students with disabilities and establish procedures for granting waivers to the requirement that all students pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination. Because these changes will not go into effect until the 2002/003 school year they are not included as part of this booklet. A finalized document will be developed this year published at the start of the 2002/2003 school year.

I hope this information is useful as you fully implement the Alaska Comprehensive System of Student Assessments.

Sincerely,

Shirley J. Holloway

Shirley J. Holloway
Commissioner of Education & Early Development

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OVERVIEW

The policy for assuring accountability of Alaska's public school system is provided by the Quality Schools Initiative. The Quality Schools Initiative (QSI) requires school districts to adopt challenging academic standards in reading, writing and mathematics, and to assess whether students are attaining the standards.

To ensure full accountability, districts must assess all students, including students with disabilities and those who are limited English proficient (LEP). To accomplish this, the Department of Education & Early Development has developed a two-tiered Comprehensive System of Student Assessments:

REGULAR ASSESSMENTS These include criterion-referenced tests at grades three, six and eight (called Benchmark Examinations) and a High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE) for the high school level. Regular assessments also include norm-referenced tests given at selected grade levels and test accommodations and modifications for some students.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENTS These are available for students with disabilities, who, even with accommodations, are unable to participate in the regular assessments.

The following sections describe procedures to assist schools in making decisions about how to include students with disabilities and students who are LEP in state assessments. These guidelines promote the inclusion of all students in regular assessments. They are consistent with Alaska statutes and regulations and such federal laws as the *Improving America's Schools Act* and *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.*

MAKING DECISIONS

About Students with Disabilities

The **Individualized Educational Program** (IEP) is the cornerstone for educating a child with a disability. The IEP is a written statement of a child's educational program that identifies services needed for the child to grow and learn during the school year. The IEP defines goals for the school year; the services needed to help the child meet those goals; and a method of evaluating progress. As its name suggests, the Individualized Educational Program is written to reflect the child's *individual and unique* needs. The student's IEP team makes one of three decisions regarding assessment participation. These are:

- Participation in regular assessments *without* accommodations.
- Participation in regular assessments *with* accommodations.
- Participation in special education alternate assessments.

It is expected that a small (less than 2 percent) number of all students will participate in alternate assessments. These will be students whose disabilities are so significant that they are not involved in a standard course of study leading to a high school diploma. When a student's IEP calls for alternate assessments, the reasons must be documented on the IEP.

In deciding that a student should participate in alternate assessments, an IEP team must ensure that:

- The student's cognitive ability and adaptive skill levels prevent completing the standard academic curricula, even with modifications and accommodations.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to apply and transfer skills.
- The student is involved in a functional, basic-skills education program.
- The student's inability to complete the standard academic curricula is not the result of extended absences; visual, auditory, or physical disabilities; emotional-behavioral disabilities; specific learning disabilities; or social, cultural, or economic differences.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires accommodations for some students with disabilities. Its purpose is to help students whose disabilities may limit their access to instruction. A 504 Accommodation Plan is not an Individualized Education Program. However, a student moving from a special education to

a regular education placement could be served under a 504 Accommodation Plan. As with students in special education, the 504 team makes one of the above decisions regarding how students will participate in assessments.

The Importance of Including Parents

The consequences of testing have changed significantly with the implementation of Sec. 14.03.075. Beginning in 2004, students will need to pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination in order to receive a diploma. Students with disabilities and students who are Limited English Proficient are included in this requirement. For this reason it is very important that schools make concerted efforts to involve parents in decisions about testing that may affect their children. Decisions about testing are often difficult to make and the probability of making the best choices are improved when the student and parent are included.

Accommodation Guidelines for Students in Special Education and Students with a 504 Accommodation Plan

In order to provide fair and valid assessments, students will be allowed appropriate accommodations when being tested. Test accommodations are defined as follows:

> A testing accommodation is a change made to ensure that information obtained from a test is an accurate reflection of what the test is intended to measure rather than a measure of the student's disability. Accommodations are changes to the setting, scheduling, timing, presentation or response format of a test made to reduce confounding influences of a disability. Accommodations are designed for specific individuals to meet specific needs that these individuals have. While meeting these needs, accommodations must not compromise the validity of the test. (adapted from Models for Understanding Task Comparability).

Test Accommodations versus Test Modifications

Some changes to the setting, scheduling, timing, presentation or response format of a test alter what is measured by the test. For example, when the questions on a reading test are read to an examinee, the test results do not represent reading ability. Similarly, when a calculator is used on a test of basic mathematics competencies, it is a skill other than computation that is being measured. Other changes can alter the level of performance expected on a test, for example administering a 3rd grade test to a 6th grade student. Changes to a testing situation that alter what the test measures or the level of performance that must be met are called test modifications. Thus, modified tests produce invailid test scores.

Selecting Test Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Because of the close link between assessment and instruction, accommodations for assessment must be part of the student's instruction. The IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan of students with disabilities must describe the accommodations. This allows those who best understand the student's needs to choose assessment accommodations.

Research shows that new test accommodations given to students with disabilities that have not been a part of their special education program can actually lower achievement levels in some cases. In other words, an accommodation should not be added immediately before an examination in the mistaken hope that it will improve test scores. In general, any accommodations provided to a student should have been used in that student's regular or special education classes for at least three (3) months prior to testing. Educators must document on the IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan their use and provide a clear rationale for determining assessment accommodations.

Any list of accommodations will eventually be rendered incomplete because advances in the technology of adaptive and assistive devices will eventually lead to new accommodations. For this reason, the accommodations listed in Table 1 should not be viewed as exhaustive. In some circumstances an IEP team may have to consider the appropriateness of an accommodation not included in Table 1. In such circumstances, the IEP team should evaluate the appropriateness of a potential accommodation by considering the following questions:

1. Is the change being considered a modification or an accommodation? In other words, will the change alter the validity of the test?
2. Will the change give the student an unfair advantage in the test?
3. Is the change needed to lessen the impact of a disability, or will it artificially raise the test score of the student?
4. Will the change compromise test security or violate test administration rules?

Once test accommodations have been selected and documented in the IEP or 504 Plan, the person responsible for administering the test must be informed. If this important step is omitted a student may be denied an accommodation for the simple reason that the test administrator or test proctor is not aware of the need to provide the accommodation. Additionally, some accommodations may require the assistance of support personnel or assistive devices and plans should be made to ensure their availability at the time of testing.

Table 1. Accommodations That Require Documentation

TIMING/SCHEDULING

- Administering the test over several days, specifying duration (not permitted for HSGQE).
- Allowing frequent breaks during testing.
- Allow additional time.

SETTING

- Administering the test individually in a separate location.
- Administering the test to a small group in a separate location.
- Providing special lighting.
- Providing adaptive or special furniture.
- Providing special acoustics.
- Administering the test in locations with minimal distractions, in a small group, study carrel, or individually.
- Using a communication device such as auditory amplification to give directions.
- Using a special test administrator, including the examinee's teacher.

PRESENTATION

- Using a Braille edition or large-type edition.

Test Directions

- Signing directions to student.
- Allowing student to ask for clarifications.
- Reading directions to student.

Test Questions

- Reading or signing math and/or writing test questions on the Benchmark Examinations to student (test questions on the Reading test may NOT be read or signed to student).
- Reading or signing test questions on the norm-referenced test to student (test questions on Reading subtests may NOT be read or signed to student).
- Using CTB McGraw-Hill tape-recorded version of HSGQE writing and mathemetics tests.
- Signing the HSGQE writing and mathematics tests (signing the HSGQE reading test is not permitted).

Use of Assistive Devices/Supports

- Using visual magnification devices.
- Using templates to reduce visible print.
- Using auditory amplification device, hearing aid, or noise buffers.
- Securing papers to work area with tape/magnets.
- Using a device to screen out extraneous sounds.
- Using masks or markers to maintain place.
- Using dark, heavy or raised lines.
- Using assistive devices.

RESPONSE

Test Format

- Using graph paper.
- Using paper in an alternative format (Braille, etc.).
- Allowing students to mark responses in test booklet if test employs a separate answer sheet.
- Using a scribe.

Use of Assistive Devices/Supports

- Allowing student to tape response for later verbatim transcription.
- Using typewriter or computer *without* spell or grammar checker.
- Dictating to a proctor/scribe.
- Allowing alternative responses such as oral, sign, typed, pointing.
- Using a Brailler.
- Using a large-diameter, special-grip pencil.
- Using markers to maintain place.

MAKING DECISIONS
About Students who are Limited English Proficient

Alaska has a long history of linguistic diversity that continues today. Among the states, Alaska is one of the few whose principal secondary languages are Native. While some Alaskans in urban and seaport areas speak Spanish, Tagalog and other Pacific Island languages, many students in large areas of the state speak Yupiit and Inupiaq Eskimo. Elsewhere there is a renewed interest in learning and teaching Tlingit, Tsimpshian, Haida, Athabascan, Aleut and other Native languages.

While students who are LEP must be assessed, it is recognized that these students may not have learned the content nor be able to fully understand English-only assessments. For this reason, districts with students whose first language is not English and who have participated in language immersion or transitional bilingual programs beginning in kindergarten or grade one, may delay administering the grade three Benchmark Examination until grade four. Subsequently, all students who are LEP will take norm-referenced tests, Benchmark Examinations at grades six and eight, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination at the appropriate grade levels.

One other exception pertains to students who are LEP who are recent immigrants. If a student who is LEP attended school for two or more years in their country of origin and English was not the language of instruction, that student may be exempted from examination. The student may be exempted from the norm-referenced test and Benchmark Examinations at grades three, six and eight, but *not* from the HSGQE. This exemption may extend for no more than one year from the date the student enters school in the United States. All other students who are LEP must participate in state assessments.

What are the Characteristics of Students who are Limited English Proficient?

The U.S. Department of Education broadly defines a linguistically diverse student (typically defined as limited English proficient) as an individual who:

1. Was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or
2. Is a Native American or Alaska Native or who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other

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than English has had a significant impact on such individual's level of English language proficiency; or

3. Is migratory and whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and

4. Has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language and whose difficulties may deny such individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society.

This population is diverse, with unique characteristics that must be assessed to ensure that the needs of each student who is LEP are addressed. The level of English proficiency varies. A student who is LEP usually enters the nation's school system with limited skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Proficiency levels can include no competency, limited-English ability, and near proficiency. Some students who are LEP who have lived in the United States for several years may appear quite fluent in English on the playground, but experience major academic difficulties.

Some students who are LEP come from families who have recently entered the country, others come from families who have lived here five or more years, and some families have lived here for generations or are native to this country. Some students who are LEP may have had no formal educational experience, while others may have had extensive experience in a formal program.

Language Proficiency Assessment Procedures for Students who are Limited English Proficient

Because districts must have an alternative language program designed to meet the linguistic and educational needs of students who are LEP, every student who is LEP must be tested for English language proficiency when initially identified. Assessment shall be done in all four areas of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Oral assessment of English language proficiency may be sufficient for students who are LEP in kindergarten and first grade, depending on the district's expectations for those grade levels. Except for students who are LEP enrolled in language immersion or transitional bilingual programs that began in kindergarten or first grade, students who are LEP in grades second through twelve are expected to have grade-appropriate skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Assessments are available for testing proficiency in these four language-skill areas. Some examples of language proficiency assessments include:

- The Idea Proficiency Test (IPT);
- Language Assessment Scales (LAS); and

- The Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey.

Staff members should identify as LEP any student scoring below the publisher's threshold of oral English proficiency. Any student who is LEP in second grade or above who is orally proficient in English but who scores below the test/assessment publisher's threshold for reading or writing proficiency (or the grade-level standard) should be identified as LEP.

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